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Records of Early English Drama

This year's second issue contains the report of Anne Lancashire (University College, University of Toronto) on her work with the London records. Meg Twycross (University of Lancaster) contributes a paper, chart and map, drawn from a study of the leases and payments for playing places, on the location of the stations of the York Cycle.

Research in progress

ANNE LANCASHIRE

London craft guild records

Two major problems face the editor of the records of London craft guilds: the sheer quantity of pre-1642 material that has survived, and the fact that most of the medieval and Renaissance craft guilds of London are still going strong today (essentially the modern guilds are private clubs) and control both the use and the publication of their own records. The second problem is major only at first, not ultimately; most, though not all, London companies have deposited the bulk of their records in London's Guildhall Library,¹ where scholars may freely consult the material,² and I have yet to approach a company that has not been generous about permission for microfilming and/or publication. But the initial process of writing to each individual company with (sometimes only possibly) relevant records for the

necessary permission is time-consuming and slow, especially when a company may take several months to deal with the request,³ and both slows down research and complicates microfilm ordering. The London editor of craft guild material is thus dealing not only with record office permissions but also with many separate permissions governing different groups of materials (for the numbers involved, see below) within record offices.⁴ Still, a bonus in dealing with still-existing companies is the editor's sense of working with a still-living tradition and the opportunity of drawing occasionally on the knowledge of contemporary company members or on the published or typewritten material of the company historians who since the eighteenth century have busied themselves with the records of their own guilds. A mass of secondary works on the companies — some whole published volumes, many short pamphlets — exists; and many of these were originally put together for private circulation only and consequently have not found their way into any of the standard published historical bibliographies. Most are held in the Printed Books Department of the Guildhall Library and are listed in its subject card catalogue. Though examination reveals the greatest number of them to be of little or no use to the REED London editor in the end, a few are of very great help indeed.

Now for the extent of the material. Ninety-two London craft guilds — most of which still exist — have all or part of their records now in the Guildhall Library;⁵ only nineteen of these companies either do not have records in the Library going back to 1642 or earlier or have only early items which are of types of no interest to REED. This leaves the London editor with the records of seventy-three companies in the Guildhall Library alone to be examined. Setting aside, for the moment, the records of the Fishmongers, Grocers, Haberdashers, Merchant Taylors, and Vintners (for these companies, see the next paragraph below), the early records of many of these seventy-three companies have never been studied by other than company historians (and sometimes not even by those); the records of others have been gone over, and then usually not thoroughly, only by social or general historians; and publication of company records, where it has occurred, has been largely miscellaneous. A few companies have had their records examined in some detail, with lengthy excerpts or large portions of specific documents published; but these published portions may only incidentally include dramatic and theatrical material. The Carpenters' Company is unique in that its major records are being edited and published in an on-going series begun in 1913 by Bower Marsh; the latest volume, by A.M. Millard, came out in 1968; yet at the edition's current rate of progress, completion before 2050 seems unlikely, since the Company possesses a wealth of significant record material. Previous work on the records of the London companies has thus been limited, given the large amount of material awaiting attention; even in cases where parts of company records have been published, though large and obvious entries concerning drama tend to have been included, for example, an account of an Armourers and Braziers' feast in 1585 at which occurred a procession by a boy in armour, a virgin leading a lamb (cf Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, I.i), a drum and a flute,⁶ many not-so-obvious references have not been noted.

The dramatic records of the twelve so-called Great Companies, the twelve

companies first in precedence among all the London craft guilds and from among the membership of which the lord mayor was nearly always chosen, have been edited, for the period 1485-1640, for the Malone Society in two separate volumes: *Collections III* (1954), containing the dramatic records of the Drapers, Fishmongers, Goldsmiths, Grocers, Haberdashers, Ironmongers, Merchant Taylors, Mercers, Skinners, and Vintners; *Collections V* (1960 for 1959), containing the dramatic records of the Clothworkers. Few records of the remaining Great Company, the Salters, survived the Great Fire of 1666. I have thus far deliberately avoided dealing with the Great Companies in my two summer forays (1977 and 1978) into Guildhall Library material (and only six of the Great Companies — Fishmongers, Grocers, Haberdashers, Merchant Taylors, Salters, and Vintners — have so far deposited their records here in any case⁷), because of the existence of the Malone Society work; but eventually I shall have to go through their pre-1485 and 1641-2 records, and shall also have to check through the period 1485-1640 for the types of record entries ignored by the Malone Society but relevant to REED (eg, entries relating to coronations and to royal entries). Clearly more exciting to deal with will be the records of significant lesser companies such as the Bakers, Barber-Surgeons, and Blacksmiths. And the chronological format of the REED volumes will provide a most valuable perspective on the total dramatic activities of the London companies in any given year, making even small references in the records of minor companies sometimes highly significant in the context of London craft guild records as a whole. Companies pay for plays at special feasts and for minstrels often at banquets; they rent their halls for dramatic performances; they take part in formal processions on barges down the river Thames with banners, drums, and trumpets; they contribute funds to civic pageants; they pass ordinances forbidding their apprentices to frequent playhouses. They participate in midsummer watches and in May games: in the Armourers and Braziers' records, for example, we read in both the yeomanry court minutes and the regular court minutes about a long-drawn-out incident of damage and loss resulting from the loan by one member of the company to two other members of some May game armour.⁸ They also have to do with problematic events like musters and royal entries where the records are often unclear as to whether anything really relevant to REED is going on (for example, is the particular muster a special 'show' only, or are the soldiers not making a ceremonial display but actually preparing to go to the wars?). Related to these company records are general civic records: for example, civic ordinances having to do with pageants.

In the summer of 1977 — my first summer of REED work — I concentrated on one typical, fairly important lesser company, the Armourers and Braziers. Extensive and serious damage to their manuscripts during World War II made on-the-spot work with the records essential; and a fairly thorough examination of these records would, I correctly thought, familiarize me with the major problems I would be encountering over and over again with the records of all the other London companies. In the summer of 1978, after this useful Armourers and Braziers work, I decided to try to cover a large number of companies, and, in an attempt to clear

entirely out of the way as many as possible of the seventy-three companies with pre-1642 records, focussed on the companies which either had very few pre-1642 materials extant or which seemed least likely to have records containing material of relevance to REED. This unexciting but useful exercise disposed of nineteen companies as having no dramatic-ceremonial-minstrelsy records from before 1642, and of a further seven as having a few relevant records only, which I immediately transcribed. Of the remaining forty-seven companies, the records of a very few have by now been largely checked, of some partly checked, and of many not yet checked at all. The companies with the most promising records I have still to do. A few examples of the more interesting entries uncovered so far are appended to this report; not having been able as yet to do a thorough search of the secondary materials in my bibliography (indeed, I do not think such a search should be made for a while), I do not know which of these entries may have appeared somewhere before in print and which are fresh discoveries.

The enormous quantity of the London craft guild material means that my examination of the records will be a long process. Although one company may have only a couple of charters and an ordinance book dating from before 1642, another may have some twenty manuscript volumes of possibly-relevant records, not to mention hundreds of individual wills, deeds of gift, leases, etc; and any one manuscript volume may have as few as two or three or as many as one thousand pages. Usually one finds that a company will have an average of half a dozen manuscripts of major importance to be examined, and that each one of these manuscripts may run into several volumes of anywhere between one hundred and eight hundred pages each. Some companies have even more material. Leaving aside, yet again, the Great Companies, which tend to be great also in quantity of extant record material, the Carpenters, for example, have nine manuscripts which run to a total of eighteen volumes and nineteen files; the Bakers and Brown Bakers together, twenty manuscripts for a total of twenty-eight volumes; the Cutlers, eleven manuscripts for a total of eleven volumes and thirty-six rolls. And then there are the difficulties such as those found in working on the Parish Clerks' Company: original records largely destroyed during World War II but antiquarian collections of transcriptions and notes to be gone through, one such collection being now housed in two filing cabinets!

Given the volume of the material to be covered, the London editor clearly cannot go through every livery company document of possible REED significance. All major records, such as court minute books and wardens' accounts must be examined; all minor records, such as inventories, likely to contain REED material must be examined; all other records must be searched where the editor has been specially tipped off, by other primary or secondary sources, as to the likely presence of REED material. But the editor cannot read everything, for example, the thousands of individual wills, leases, and deeds of gift, even though the occasional one of these documents (one out of a thousand?) may well contain information of significance to REED. The law of diminishing returns applies. After considerable reading and thought I have drawn up two lists of types of documents: (1) a list of

documents which must always be read because nearly always containing at least some REED information; (2) a list of documents not usually to be read (unless some other source points to them as significant), because most unlikely to yield any relevant information. If in the experience of any other REED editor some kinds of manuscripts here seem to appear on the wrong list, I should very much like to be put right. In each list the kinds of manuscripts are given in groups of descending importance; and clearly the lists are not all-inclusive. Individual companies, for example, often have unique or near-unique kinds of manuscripts which would not be included here, such as the Vintners' journals of the farmers of duties on wine imported into London (a List 2 kind of manuscript).

List 1: to be read

Group 1 court minute books
yeomanry court minute books
account books
quarterage accounts (when going beyond a mere listing of names and sums and including, eg, quarterly supper expenses)
triumphs accounts (only a couple of companies have these)

Group 2 ordinances
charters
act and ordinance books
abstracts of charters and ordinances where originals and full copies no longer exist
transcriptions of relevant acts of the Court of Aldermen, of Parliament, etc
transcriptions of precepts (especially of those of the lord mayor)
audit books

{ may be reliably read in office copies or in later compilations

Group 3 inventories
memorandum books
evidence books
miscellaneous volumes or
collections with pre-1642
material

Group 4 later extracts from court books
antiquarian manuscript histories,
collections, and notes

{ to be used as helps with the
original MSS, or as primary
where the originals no longer
exist

Group 5

charity account books
receipt books

{ I have dealt with only a few so
far, which have been entirely
irrelevant, but I should like to
examine some more before
moving these two groups of MSS
to List 2

List 2: usually not to be read

Group 1 wills
deeds of gift
deeds of title
bonds
lists of benefactors
legal documents re: suits
charity documents
leases/rentals
receipts (individual - ie, not
entered in a single receipt
book)
letters

{ Ideally one would read all of
these, given world enough and
time

Group 2 lists of wardens, etc
registers of apprentice bindings
and of freedom admissions
livery lists

{ These MSS I check to make sure
they contain nothing extra,
beyond the lists of names, of
possible interest to REED

- Group 3 later manuscript transcriptions
of relevant material, where the
originals still exist
- Group 4 Irish estate material (mainly
accounts)
wheat/corn accounts
minutes of prosecution of non-
freemen
search and view books
search documents
grants of arms
inspeximus charters (where
earlier charters exist)⁹

In summary, then, work on the records of the London craft guilds is slowly progressing. What of the other kinds of London records?

Other London records

So far I have been able to deal with other kinds of records only in a bibliographical way. Civic records clearly go along with craft guild records, and Ian Lancashire has begun work on the London parish records. The main areas being covered to date in London thus largely correspond, more or less, to the areas being covered by REED editors in the various shires of England. But, because London is London, it contains other groups of records which should also be examined and which the editors of the guild, civic, and parish records cannot do if the project is to be completed within a reasonable length of time.¹⁰ Some three more London editors, willing to work in co-operation, are probably needed: (1) to go systematically through the material – not just concerning London but concerning the rest of the country as well – in the Public Record Office (eg, records of Star Chamber, of the Court of Requests, of Chancery); (2) to tackle ecclesiastical records other than parish records (eg, diocesan archives, monastic records, Consistory Court papers); (3) to look at records of the various Inns of Court and of schools such as Charterhouse, Highgate and Christ's Hospital, which means moving from public into private drama; the area is clearly an important one and should be covered if at all possible.

Sample entries of interest

1426

Blacksmiths: Ordinances Guildhall Library MS 5535

p 34

...

quarter
day

Also the maister & þe wardens shal kepe her quarter day the munday sevennyght after þe xijth. day euery yere vpon the payne of x s. to be rered of þe maister & þe wardens þe tone half to þe chamber & þe oþer half to ye forsaide craftes . & þey shal haue at the saide quarter day . goode brede & goode ale & conyes bake a goode fire & a play & euery man & woman þat commyth þerto shal pay ij d* a pece & þe maister & þe wardens shalbe rewarded for þe play of þe box euery yere iij s iij d.

...

?1559-61

Armourers & Braziers: Wardens' Account Books Guildhall Library MS 12065, vol 1 f 203v

...

It(…) (...) vnto Rob(…)t diuine player on sent georges daye (...)

...

1585

Saddlers: Audit Book Guildhall Library MS 5384

f 33v

...

Item we the saide Awditors have receavid and brought in from certayne of our geomandrie which were assigned to holde certayne torche lightes at hir majesties commyng by the parke Corner to St James which they prodigally and laciviously burned homewardes (being whole & vnoccupied) vij s iij d

...

Armourers & Braziers: Court Minute Books Guildhall Library MS 12071, vol 2

p 483

...

This year in maye was framid vpe vj or viij lines ij^m shott and ij^m armid men who Did fnew & exercise them selvs beffore the queens magesty / the cost wheroff was so great yat ye lord mayer & aldermen made suet that ye watch other then of

* In later correction in a different hand the end of this line reads as follows: pay ij d ^ the man & ij d the woman whether thei come or come not & [a pece &] . Part of the addition spreads into the righthand margin.

standyng watch myght this yere be sparyd notwithstandinge the queens magestys
letter above sayd / & so only halff ye constables watchyd with thyr watchys with
cressetes & Droms only vpon saynt Ihon Baptist even & owr lyttell shew was made
beffore ye lord mayer & sheryves only besyde

...

1631-2

Masons: Renter Wardens' Accounts Guildhall Library MS 5303, vol 1
f 85v

...

Money received towardes the payment of x li xv s assessde by acte of Common
^counsell' on this company towardes ye defrayeing of the Citties charge aboute
the Pageantes erected within the same att ye beginning of his majestes raigne yat
now is . videlicet

...

NOTES

- 1 This is an excellent library, in a modern building, with good facilities for scholars: comfortable reading rooms for both manuscripts and printed books, full reference section, extensive card catalogues, speedy delivery (ie, within fifteen minutes) of requested items, photocopy service which takes two to ten days depending on season and demand, one ultraviolet lamp available, microfilm readers, friendly and most helpful staff.
- 2 A very few companies still hold most of their own records, though a few miscellaneous items may have found their way to the Guildhall Library; many companies have kept back a few rare items (eg, first charter, a medieval memorandum book, first ordinances) for display in their own halls; and sometimes early company historians may have done written work which is still held by the company rather than deposited in the Library.
- 3 Some companies are quick to respond, but others have a lengthy procedure for dealing with such requests.
- 4 Special permission is not needed for minor photocopying, but permission to publish miscellaneous entries from photocopies will be needed before the REED London volumes can be finished.
- 5 The number of the companies can vary slightly depending on how one counts: eg, the Bakers and Brown Bakers during the period covered by REED were sometimes two companies and sometimes one, and are one now.
- 6 Armourers and Braziers' Court Minute Books: Guildhall Library MS 12071, vol 2, p 483. The patron saint of the company is St George.
- 7 Note too that the Merchant Taylors have deposited not the original records but complete microfilms of them, and that the surviving Salters' records located here are not relevant to REED.
- 8 Armourers and Braziers: Guildhall Library MSS 12073, ff 32v and 35v, and 12071, vol 2 pp 6-7, 51, 54.
- 9 These charters merely recite the details of earlier charters, though clearly they should be read where the earlier charters no longer exist. I do not include in this category charters which may be called basically *in speximus* but which do contain some additional material of their own.
- 10 Some of these records are types which are normally being covered in the shires, and only the vast amount of London material necessitates their being separately grouped here.